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Meese to Press Mexico At Antidrug Conference

U.S. Expected to Focus on DEA Agent Cases

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Attorney General Edwin Meese III will lead a U.S. delegation to Mexico City Wednesday for a drug enforcement conference that will involve about a dozen Latin American nations, and U.S. delegates are expected to press the Mexicans on cooperation in two cases involving the murder of one American drug agent and the kidnaping and torture of another.

In addition, the delegation will address general drug enforcement strategy, including the possibility of operations similar to the just-completed, 10-week Operation Blast Furnace in Bolivia in which military support personnel assisted U.S. drug agents and Bolivian troops to wipe out many cocaine processing facilities.

Federal Drug Enforcement Administration head John C. Lawn, who will accompany Meese, said last week that DEA operations in Mexico have generally returned to normal since the Aug. 13 kidnaping of DEA agent Victor Cortez Jr.

But Lawn and other Justice Department sources say the Mexican prosecution of 11 Mexican policemen charged with torturing Cortez appears to have bogged down.

Cortez, who had been stationed in Guadalajara, was abducted by the policemen, beaten, tortured with electric shocks and interrogated about DEA operations in Mexico.

After a strong U.S. diplomatic protest demanding punishment, the 11 policemen were charged Aug. 26 with abuse of authority and injuring Cortez. They have remained free while a Guadalajara judge decides whether there is sufficient evidence to try them.

The judge, Oscar Vasquez Marin, said two weeks ago that he can make a final decision on whether to try the policemen in the case only after the file of evidence is complete. But he has said the file is in-

complete because it lacks testimony from Cortez.

Despite statements by DEA and the U.S. Embassy that they would accept the Mexican request and that Cortez's testimony would be provided, the judge said he has not been able to issue a summons for Cortez's testimony because he does not know his U.S. address.

Lawn reiterated last week, "We've said we would either make him available personally or available for a deposition. But they haven't reached out for him." He said that Cortez is being reassigned to the Washington area.

The United States is still pursuing the case of DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar, who was abducted in Guadalajara in February 1985, tortured and murdered. Federal grand juries here and in San Diego are taking testimony in the case. Several key suspects are believed to be at large in Mexico.

Despite the tensions between the two countries created by the two incidents, Lawn said he believes DEA has a good working relationship with most Mexican law enforcement authorities.

Up until the Cortez kidnaping there was no specific agreement with Mexico to allow the DEA agents stationed there to carry weapons, but it was an open secret that the agents regularly carried weapons for protection.

Lawn said that the Mexican government has since given approval for DEA to carry weapons. "The question of weapons came up . . . We said that if a decision is made for DEA agents not to carry weapons, we won't stay there. That has been resolved with the attorney general of Mexico," he said.

Lawn said there has been a continuing problem of hostility to DEA by the Mexican public. He said it is directed particularly against agents who are Mexican-American. "They feel as if our DEA personnel forget their Mexican roots," Lawn said.